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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000555

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [CU](#) [EUN](#) [USEU](#) [BRUSSELS](#)

SUBJECT: EU-CUBA: BACK TO FULL "CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT?"

REF: A. A) PRAGUE 174

[B. B\) USEU TODAY 02/01/05](#)

[C. C\) STATE 4900](#)

[D. D\) 04 BRUSSELS 4080](#)

Classified By: USEU POLOFF TODD HUIZINGA, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1. \(C\) SUMMARY:](#) The EU's January 31 decision to suspend its June 2003 restrictive measures (ref B) against Cuba should "increase EU engagement with the Cuban opposition" according to EU HighRep Javier Solana's Adviser on Latin America (protect). It is difficult to see how that will actually play out, however, since he confirmed that all EU members would stop inviting dissidents to national day celebrations in Havana, while other plans for engaging the opposition were only &political recommendations⁸ to EU member states that are not &legally binding.⁸ Unless the small minority of member states that favor a tough stance toward Cuba -- principally the Czechs (ref A) and Poles -- prevail, this latest EU move may prove to be a de facto return to a full policy of "constructive engagement" that will not result in noticeably increased EU engagement with the opposition. Even though Castro publicly ridiculed the EU's new measures, the EU has chosen to ignore what they dismiss as typical Castro posturing. The U.S. can still influence the EU offering ideas on contacts with dissidents and urging like-minded EU states to put teeth in the six-month review. END SUMMARY.

EU: MEASURES SUSPENDED "TO HELP DISSIDENTS"

[12. \(C\)](#) In a February 3 meeting with Poloff, Nicolas Pascual de la Parte (protect), Chief of the Latin America Task Force in EU HighRep Javier Solana's Policy Unit, and Dusan Chrenek (protect), Policy Unit Desk Officer, argued that the temporary suspension of the EU restrictive measures against Cuba approved by EU FonMins on January 31 was "not in order to appease Castro, but to increase EU engagement with Cuban dissidents." Pascual said inviting dissidents to national day celebrations in EU embassies in Havana was a symbolic, but not substantive, engagement with Cuban dissidents. This symbolic move, he said, had not borne fruit; it had resulted only in the Castro regime's freezing of diplomatic contacts with the EU, thereby decreasing the EU's influence and making it more difficult to engage both Cuban officials and dissidents substantively. Temporarily suspending the measures, Pascual said, demanded a greater commitment from Castro than from the EU: in order for the six-month suspension to become permanent, Castro would have to make progress toward human rights and democratic reform and not stand in the way of an EU push for greater engagement with dissidents, families of political prisoners, and civil society actors such as the Catholic church.

ALL EU MEMBERS TO HALT DISSIDENT INVITATIONS

[13. \(C\)](#) Pascual confirmed that language on halting invitations for dissidents was not mentioned in the January 31 GAERC conclusions in order to satisfy &a member state,⁸ the Czech Republic, that was uncomfortable about suspending the measures and objected particularly to snubbing the dissidents. Chrenek said, &that,s the way we do it in the EU; give a little here, get a little there, and everybody,s happy.⁸ When we asked whether member states therefore had the implicit freedom to invite dissidents, however, Pascual said that &all the June 2003 measures have been suspended, including that one, and all member states have agreed their embassies will act along those lines.⁸

PLAN TO ENGAGE OPPOSITION NOT BINDING

[14. \(C\)](#) Pascual said that there were specific recommendations on engaging the opposition in Cuba, although they had not been included in the EU FonMins, GAERC conclusions. He said a separate document of recommendations from EU Heads of Mission (HOMs) in Havana had been approved by both the EU Latin America Working Group (COLAT) and the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC). The plan had not been released outside of the EU, said Pascual, because publicizing it would forewarn Castro and thus render it ineffectual. When asked whether EU FonMins had also approved the plan, Pascual said

the plan was not part of the package the FonMins had been asked to consider: it represented a political recommendation to member states, but was not legally binding.⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS EXIST ON ENGAGING DISSIDENTS

15. (C) Pascual outlined some of the recommendations in the HOMs, plan for engaging the opposition: EU embassy Political Counselors in Havana would meet once a month with dissident leaders; EU HOMs should meet regularly (once or twice per each six-month EU presidency) with dissidents and relatives of political prisoners; the EU Human Rights Working Group in Havana should meet once per EU presidency; and EU embassies should allow civil society and dissidents access, within the embassies, to the internet, press from outside of Cuba, and other literature which is unavailable on the island. In view of these recommendations, Pascual opined that the biggest question raised by the suspension of the restrictive measures was not how much the EU had given in to Castro, but whether Castro would swallow getting a rhetorical victory in exchange for allowing the EU the substantive victory of greater access to dissidents.⁸ Regarding Castro's February 1 defiant remarks on the EU move (What are they going to forgive us for? We don't need Europe⁸), Pascual said he did not give much weight to Castro's posturing.

REVIEW OF SUSPENSION PRO FORMA?

16. (C) The GAERC decision included a call to review the temporary suspension, promising action "before July." Pascual asserted that this review would not be pro forma. He could not give any specifics, however, on what Castro would have to do in the next six months in order for the suspension to be continued beyond July. He also admitted that six months was a short time by EU standards, and that the argument would likely be made that Castro should be given more time to implement reforms or release political prisoners before re-instituting the restrictive measures.

17. (C) COMMENT: Pascual's attempts to justify the suspension of the measures by contrasting the mere symbolism of inviting dissidents to national days with the substantive opportunities now opened up to engage dissidents while re-engaging with the Cuban authorities were typical of the reasoning we have heard throughout the previous months, deliberations on EU Cuba policy. Now that the measures have been suspended, the EU appears to have only a vague idea of the way forward: the HOMs, recommendations that we know of are constructive (some of them resemble suggestions USG officials have made to them earlier * see refs C-D), but they are only recommendations, not legally binding, and not, unlike the suspension itself, approved by EU FonMins. There is little indication that EU member states will be able to agree on any specific benchmarks for Cuban behavior (release of political prisoners, for example) that would put teeth in the planned six-month review of the suspensions. Unless the small minority of member states that favor a tough stance toward Cuba -- principally the Czechs and Poles -- prevail, this latest EU move may prove to be a de facto return to a full policy of "constructive engagement" that will not result in noticeably increased EU engagement with the opposition. The U.S. can still influence this process by offering ideas on contacts with dissidents and urging like-minded EU states to put teeth in the six-month review. END COMMENT.

SCHNABEL

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